

JUST THE FACTS

FAMILY RISK AND PROTECTIVE FACTORS

AN EDUCATIONAL FACT SHEET FROM
THE FLORIDA ALCOHOL & DRUG ABUSE ASSOCIATION

Families have certain characteristics which increase the possibility that children will experiment with or abuse alcohol and other drugs (AOD). These are called risk factors. Genetics, family conflict, condoning alcohol/drug use, harsh discipline, an alcohol/drug abusing parent, are examples of risk factors.

The family may also have characteristics that protect children and decrease the likelihood of AOD abuse. These are called protective factors. Protective factors include family bonding, good parenting, shared responsibilities, clear expectations, quality time and other factors.

By decreasing risk factors and increasing protective factors children can grow up in healthier environment and learn to handle challenges without resorting to alcohol/drug abuse.

POPULATIONS AT RISK

Current statistics regarding AOD abuse in the United States indicate that many adolescents are at risk for abusing substances, either by parental example or by behavior they have already developed.

- ❑ Children of alcoholics are two to four times more likely to develop alcoholism than children from nonalcoholic families.
- ❑ Initiation of daily smoking most often occurs in grades 6 through 9. Nearly three-quarters of the daily smokers in high school are daily smokers 7 to 9 years later.
- ❑ 9 percent of adolescents committed to juvenile justice programs and community control in Florida were committed for drug offenses in FY 1997-98.
- ❑ Children as young as 4th graders who use inhalants will also start experimenting with other drugs, usually marijuana and alcohol.

FAMILY RISK FACTORS

Not every child growing up in a family with one or several of the following risk factors becomes an ATOD abuser, but these factors may increase the likelihood of abuse. Risk factors within the family include:

Family Management Practices. The way the family is managed by the parents may increase the possibility of AOD abuse by the children. These management practices include:

- ❑ Unclear expectations for behavior—children are not given clear messages about what behavior is expected of them; nor do they receive any boundaries
- ❑ Poor monitoring of behavior—giving insufficient attention to a child's behavior
- ❑ Few and inconsistent rewards of behavior—if a child exhibits good behavior, it may not be acknowledged, or not acknowledged on a regular basis
- ❑ Inconsistent discipline—parents may be very harsh in one situation and lenient in a similar instance
- ❑ Over involvement or under involvement with children—one parent may be over-involved with the children while the other is very distant.
- ❑ Lack of bonding or closeness between family members—children may not trust their families as a source of warmth and support
- ❑ family conflict—conflict between parents and other family members
- ❑ Lack of involvement in family activities—the child is not invited to participate in family tasks, decisions and activities

Family History of AOD Abuse. If one or both parents have a history of alcoholism or other drug abuse, it increase the risk of their children becoming an alcoholic/drug abuser, either through environmental exposure or family genetics. Sons born to alcoholic fathers run four times the risk of becoming alcoholic as sons born to non-alcoholic fathers.

Condoning AOD Abuse. The message that AOD abuse is acceptable increases the likelihood that abuse will occur. If parents and/or other adults drink, smoke and abuse other substances, it sets an example for the children. The risk is further increased if the parents involve children in drug-using behavior—for example asking a child to light the parent's cigarette or get the parent a beer from the refrigerator.

PROTECTIVE FACTORS

There are many factors within the family that can protect children from AOD abuse. The presence of one or more of these factors in a family is not an absolute indicator that a child will be drug free. They simply buffer the risk. Here are examples of protective factors for the family.

Family bonding. A strong relationship between parents and children helps children feel safe, loved and supported. It offers them a trusting environment in which they can be happy. A strong family relationship can help children overcome problems.

Effective parenting. Effective parenting involves a number of important factors, which decrease the risk of AOD abuse by youth. Parents can develop effective parenting skills within their families by providing the following:

Consistent praise/low criticism. Parents who provide children with consistent praise and low amounts of behavior criticism reinforce the child's self-esteem, a crucial component in resisting AOD abuse.

Clear expectations/high expectations. Parents create boundaries for children when they communicate clearly and consistently the standards acceptable within the family unit. These boundaries help children make decisions about their actions and the consequences of those actions. Parents who have high expectations for their children, particularly for academic achievement, create another protective factor for the family.

Quality time/sharing responsibilities. Regular time for shared family activities, such as hobbies, sports, meals, house-keeping, holidays and other family gatherings creates stability and a nurturing environment for family members to support each other.

Stress management. How families manage stressful events greatly effects children. If a family can capably manage events such as death, unemployment, or other unfortunate events they can assist in protecting children from risky situations. Seeking counseling, providing children with explanations of stressful events, and/or enlisting support from the extended family and community, are all ways to maintain and support the family during times of stress.

Supportive adult relationships/extended families.

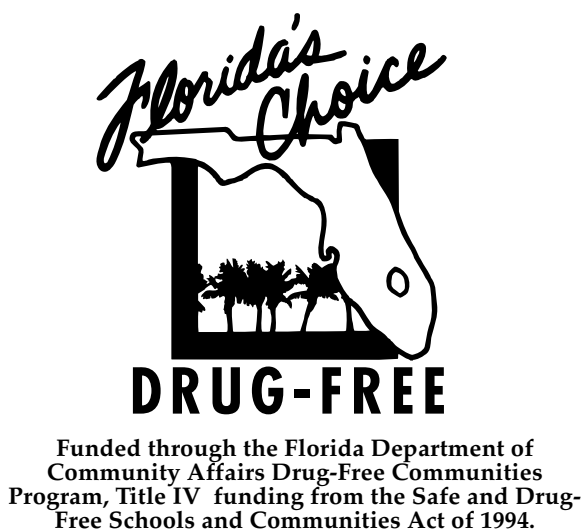
Often families experiencing financial or marital difficulties, or AOD abuse, may isolate themselves from extended family members such as aunts or grandparents, and from community members such as neighbors or school officials. It is important for the family to expose children to caring adults beyond the immediate family, such as a sports coach, teacher or grandparent. Interest shown by these adults promotes self-esteem and can provide children with examples of other healthy adults.

HOW PARENTS CAN HELP

Parents can have strong, positive influences over the lives of their own and other children, and deter possible drug abuse by:

- ❑ becoming aware of the situations in which alcohol and other drug abuse can occur
- ❑ being concerned about the company that their children keep
- ❑ developing effective listening skills and skills which help children feel good about themselves
- ❑ being informed about prevention strategies to use at home including role modeling, peer resistance techniques, involvement in healthy alternatives, and the establishment of clear family policy with consequences concerning alcohol and other drug use.
- ❑ joining with other parents to promote an alcohol-and drug-free environment in the school, neighborhood and extended community.

For more information regarding alcohol, tobacco or other drug information, contact Florida Alcohol and Drug Abuse Association, 850-878-2196, or visit our website at www.fadaa.org.



FOR MORE INFORMATION CALL THE FLORIDA ALCOHOL & DRUG ABUSE ASSOCIATION RESOURCE CENTER
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